

## INSTRUCTIONS FOR SUBMITTING A LETTER OF INTENT TO REHABILITATION RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT SERVICE FOR A MERIT REVIEW PROPOSAL

**1. POLICY:** All applicants for research support through Rehabilitation Research and Development (RR&D) Service are required to submit a Letter of Intent (LOI). A description of the proposed project in terms of its objectives, rationale, methods, participants, resource requirements, expected outcomes, technology transfer implications, and the impact on the health care delivery system for veterans should be included. An investigator may submit a proposal only after an LOI has been reviewed and approved by RR&D. Applicants may submit more than one LOI per review cycle.

**2. PURPOSE:** The LOI review:

a. Confirms that each proposal forwarded to RR&D falls within the announced priority research areas or in those areas cited in subsequent special RFP solicitations. **NOTE:** *The Associate Chief of Staff (ACOS) for Research should carefully review the mission of each Service within Research and Development (R&D) to ensure that proposals are sent to the most appropriate Service for review.*

b. Confirms that each proposal forwarded to RR&D has the potential to add to and improve the knowledge base in specific research areas and the proposed research has near-term applicability, as opposed to more basic science and long-term research objectives.

c. Identifies and resolves major problem areas such as Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) investigator eligibility, and VA off-site research issues prior to the submission of a full proposal.

d. **Special solicitations or Request for Proposal (RFP).** An RFP can be announced at any time and have special requirements and due dates that are contained in the specific RFP. **NOTE:** *Refer to specific solicitation number and instructions for submission information.*

e. **Submission Information.** Applicants for research support to RR&D Service may submit more than one LOI per review cycle. Once an LOI is approved, an investigator has up to two Merit Review rounds to submit a proposal for review. Each proposal submission, including pilot study proposals, must be preceded by an approved LOI. An unfunded, revised proposal may be resubmitted directly for the next merit review cycle without first submitting an LOI. However, it is required that a completed LOI Cover Page (VA Form 10-1313-13, VA Research/Development Program) be submitted at least one month prior to the proposal due dates.

f. **Due Date.** The LOI process was designed to provide a systematic and defined approach to enhance the development of successful proposals for RR&D funding, to allow investigators as much time as possible to develop and fine tune proposals, and to permit adequate time for required reviews and approvals at the facility level.

Please see table at <http://www1.va.gov/resdev/funding/unified-cal04.cfm>

g. **Review Process.** An LOI will be reviewed for scientific merit, relevance to veterans' needs, RR&D Service priority areas, and whether the proposed research advances the knowledge base of rehabilitation research. Written notification of approval or disapproval will be issued through the Office of the ACOS for R&D at the Principal Investigator (PI)'s VA facility. An investigator must have an approved LOI prior to submitting a proposal to RR&D for Merit Review.

h. **Off-Site Research.** VHA policy mandates that VA-funded research be performed within VA medical centers or VA leased space, except when off-site facilities provide unique research opportunities. Off-site waiver requests must be submitted to the Director, RR&D Service at least 60 days prior to the due date for receipt of proposals. Proposals for off-site research submitted without an approved off-site waiver will be returned without review (see VHA Handbook 1200.16).

i. **Eligibility.** All applicants (i.e., the PI and any Co-PIs) for VA research funds must hold a minimum 5/8 VA salaried position before a research project can be funded (see VHA Handbook 1200.15).

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### 3. FORMAT

a. The LOI Cover Sheet (VA Form 10-1313-13) must be submitted with a LOI. Check applicable categories in each box and type in all requested information. **NOTE:** *In Box #3 marked **Program and Level**, state priority area. For **Pilot Projects** check **Other** and type in **Pilot**.*

b. The information contained in the LOI is not to exceed three pages of text, not including one page of cited references. An additional page about the PI's experience in the proposed research area is allowed.

c. Use at least 1-inch margins on all sides and a font that is easy to read and reproduce. Any LOI using low quality or small print will be returned without review. Use **bold type** for all major section headings, and separate major sections with a double space.

d. **Text Pages (not exceeding three).** At the top of each page, type PI's name and Project Title and date. In the following order, state:

(1) **Purpose.** List the goals and specific objectives of the proposed research; clearly state the question to be addressed, hypothesis to be tested, methods, concepts, systems, or devices to be developed or evaluated. (Approximately ¼ page)

(2) **Background.** State the scientific rationale for the proposed research and its relationship to other major research findings. Explain how this research will advance knowledge in

rehabilitation research. Describe the significance of the research and how it relates to RR&D priority areas. Indicate how this research directly benefits veterans and how it contributes to the quality of services provided by VA. (Approximately ½ page)

(3) **Expected Outcomes or Products.** Describe the outcome in terms of expected time and resources needed to complete the research and length of time needed for clinical application. (Approximately ¼ page)

(4) **Methods and Research Plan.** Outline the proposed study design and methods. Identify (VA) patient population, sample size, power analysis, and rationale for inclusion or exclusion of population served; (include women and members of diverse ethnic and racial groups). Identify key issues that may have an impact on the success of the proposed project, such as: patient recruitment, participation of specialized personnel, orphan companies, space, and budget. Specify if proposed research will be with animals and, if so, what the time frame is for clinical application. Indicate implications for technology transfer and potential for replication. (Approximately one page)

(5) **Participants.** Identify PI and Co-PI(s), co-investigators, and collaborators, and state their areas of expertise.

(6) **Resource and Budget.** Provide estimates of time, up to 3 years of funding (except for pilot projects which are limited to 1 year), full-time equivalent (FTE) staffing, and total cost of the study.

(7) **Project History.** Indicate whether this study is new, a continuation of an existing project (include years funded), or related to a previously unfunded project. Indicate the Project number, title, and date of the previous related submission.

(8) **Research Site.** State the name of the facility where the research (patients and laboratory work) will take place (see Item 6 on the LOI cover sheet (VA Form 10-1313-13)).

### 3. SUBMITTING THE LOI

a. **Signatures.** The LOI must be signed by the medical center Director and either the ACOS for R&D, R&D Coordinator, or the appropriate designee. LOIs will not be accepted without being processed through the appropriate research office.

b. **Deadlines.** The signed, original LOI **and six (6) copies** must be sent to the following address. With prior approval, e-mail, or facsimile copies will be accepted, but the original must follow.

Merit Review Letter of Intent Coordinator  
Program Analysis and Review Section (122P)  
Rehabilitation Research and Development Service  
Department of Veterans Affairs  
810 Vermont Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20420

c. **Electronic Submission of LOI.** In addition to the requirements for a hard copy submission, an **electronic submission** of the LOI on a disk is required as follows:

(1) The disk size must be 3 ½ in. The disk format may be high or low density (720K or 1.44 meg.) It must be MS DOS, Windows, Windows 95-98, or NT formatted.

(2) The disk must be labeled with the date, principal investigator's name, and title of proposed project. The disk must be included with the hard copy LOI submission.

#### **4. INQUIRIES AND ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

Inquiries may be directed to RR&D Service, Program Analysis and Review Section (PARS), at 202-254-0255. Please refer also to the RR&D web-site at [www.vard.org](http://www.vard.org).